



March 2, 2017

Boston City Council  
1 City Hall Square, Room 550  
Boston, MA 02201-2043

Dear Boston City Councilors:

For 22 years, I have owned and operated 2 convenience stores in Boston's Dorchester neighborhood. By and large, I have felt that the City Council has respected my work during this time, and has at least had awareness of the important role my shops play in underserved communities. Lately a few council decisions, especially the council's insistence on resurrecting a plastic bag tax proposal, are perplexing to members of the Boston Convenience Store Owners Association (BCSOA) that work hard every day to provide critical resources to our neighborhoods.

The proposed Boston plastic bag ordinance would require stores, like mine, to charge customers a tax of at least five cents for each of the city-approved reusable bags customers need to carry their groceries home. As a convenience store owner, I don't have a problem with reusable bags or other alternatives. What I take issue with is any government proposal that would add to my customers' or my business expenses without a compelling reason – and I have seen nothing that proves this singular tax measure would make Boston's litter problems go away.

Food deserts are a reality in Boston. Not all my customers have cars, so convenience stores are the closest, and sometimes only, accessible grocery option during a busy work week. In other words, for many low- and middle-income families, stores like mine *are* the neighborhood grocery store.

For those who believe a five-cent plastic bag tax can be a "good reminder" to bring reusable bags I would ask you to consider the families who shop at my store that don't have spare change, period. In between pay days, I have seen customers torn between buying milk or eggs. I have seen others walk away from the register empty-handed because they have been a few cents short.

For those who say reusable bags are easy to store in the trunk of a car, I urge you to think about whether it's fair to demand that behavior from working moms and dads who take public transportation and carry only a purse, briefcase or backpack with them when they commute?

Boston's plastic bag tax would unfairly burden low-income families, fixed-income seniors and residents who participate in food assistance programs. A fundamentally regressive measure like

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this should not be among the City Council's first priorities for 2017. In fact, it shouldn't be pursued at all.

I understand my customers' needs and financial circumstances. People are tired of being told what choices they can or can't make at the store. Just because some Boston residents can afford to pay the plastic bag tax or already have a collection of reusable bags, not everyone can do so painlessly.

This ordinance, as with the flavored tobacco prohibition instituted last year, would have an undue impact on businesses like mine and the communities we serve. And there are simply too many opportunities for selective and inequitable enforcement.

To do right by our whole community, and not just those who can afford to pay a gratuitous plastic bag tax, please do not press forward with this unfair proposal. Think of the low- and middle-income families who would bear its burden.

Boston's working people and the strength of its community and community businesses are its greatest assets. BCSOA supports efforts to protect the environment that are conscious of the small business owners in Boston.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Francisco Marte".

Francisco Marte, President  
Boston Convenience Store Owners Association

CC: Mayor Marty Walsh  
Council President Michelle Wu  
Councilor Michael Flaherty  
Councilor Annissa Essaibi George  
Councilor Ayanna Pressle  
Councilor Salvatore Lamattina  
Councilor Bill Linehan  
Councilor Frank Baker  
Councilor Andrea Campbell  
Councilor Timothy McCarthy  
Councilor Matt O'Malley  
Councilor Tito Jackson  
Councilor Josh Zakim  
Councilor Mark Ciommo